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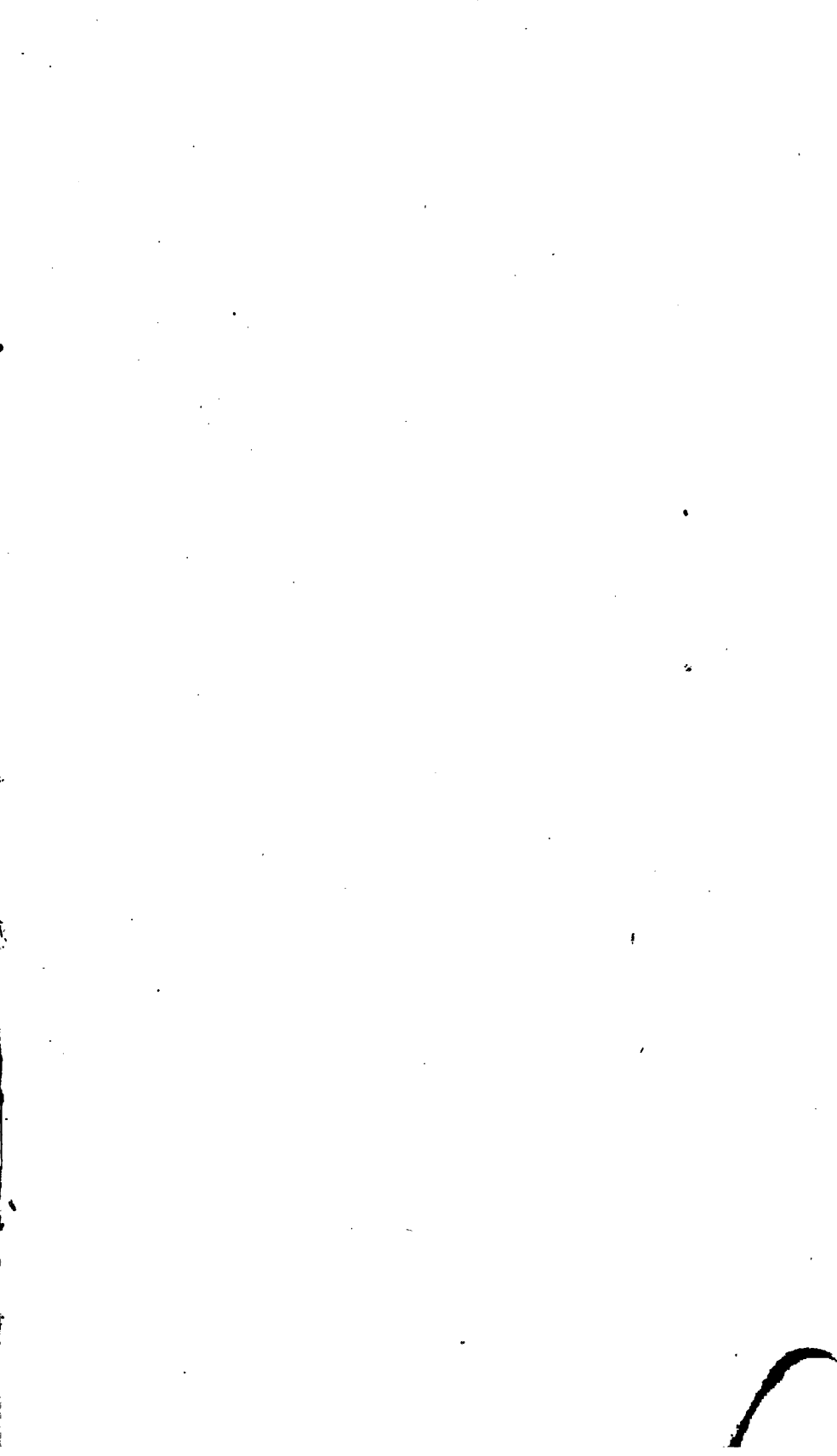
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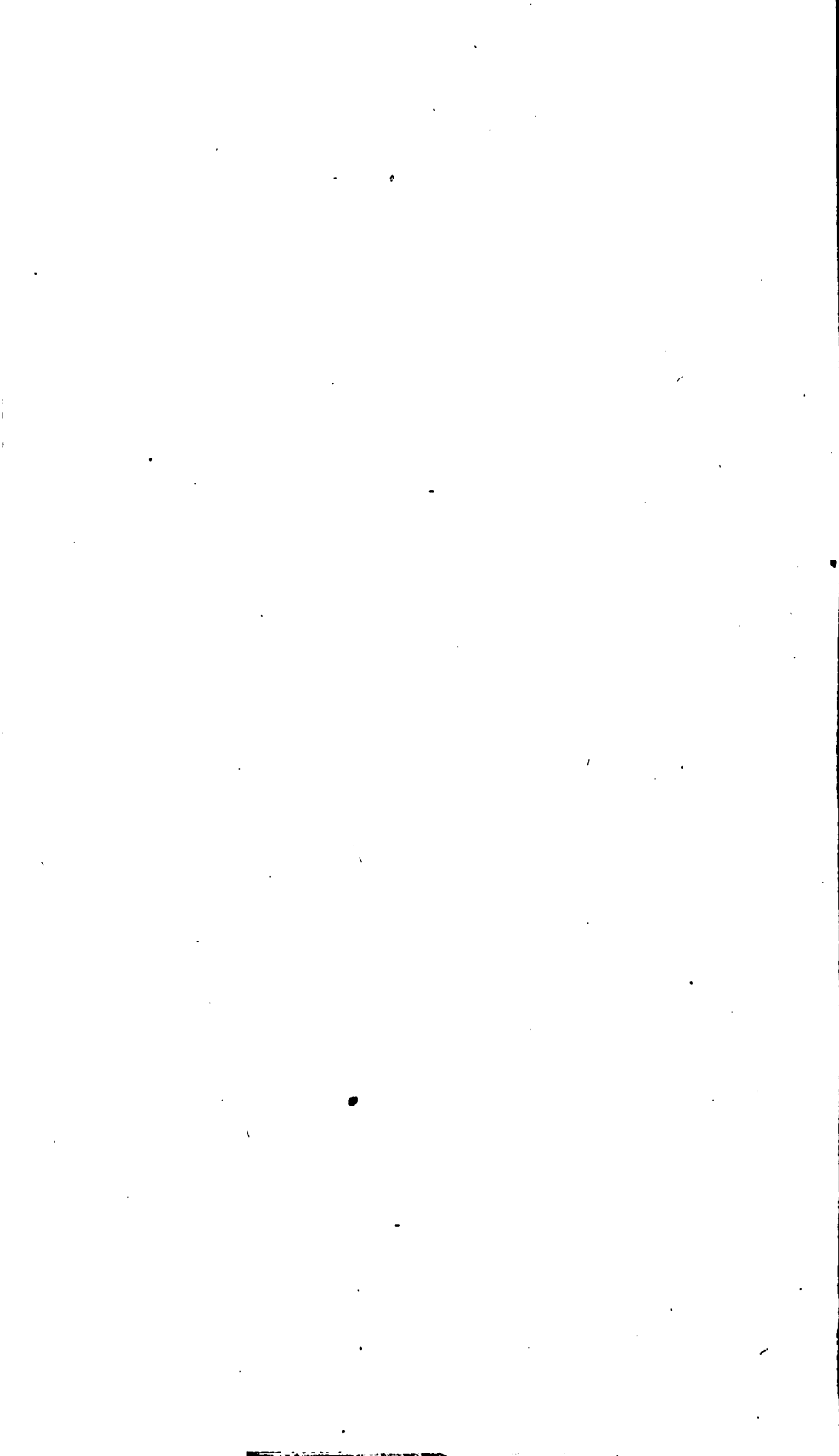
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PROCEEDINGS

OF THE

GENERAL ASSOCIATION

OF

CONNECTICUT,

RELATIVE TO THE REV. ABIEL ABBOT, LATE
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN
COVENTRY.

Published by order of the General Association.

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FROM
THE BEQUEST OF
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1918

*At a Meeting of the General Association of Connecticut,
at Sharon, June, 1812.*

THE Committee, appointed "to enquire into the proceedings of the Consociation of Tolland County on the 16th of April, 1811, &c." made a report which was accepted, as follows :

*To the General Association of Connecticut, to be convened at Sharon,
the third Tuesday of June, 1812 :*

THE Committee, appointed by the last General Association "to inquire into the proceedings of the Consociation of Tolland county, on the 16th day of April," 1811, "relative to the existing differences between the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the church in the first society in Coventry; and also into the proceedings of the council, which met on the same subject on the 5th day of June," the same year, "and to report a statement of said proceedings to the next General Association," respectfully submit the following :

1. For the purpose of laying before the General Association the most correct view of the whole subject, the committee apprehend, that a brief recurrence to facts of the last century will be necessary. By these the General Association will perceive, whether the Tolland Consociation was regularly formed, and whether the first church in Coventry is a member of that body.

The county of Tolland was formed in 1785. The churches in that county had been consociated with Hartford North, with Windham, and with Hartford South, according to their respective locations.

The first church in Coventry had been a member of the Consociation in Windham county. This is proved by the oral testimony of witnesses now living, and of the first respectability.

The proof is confirmed by written documents which seem indisputable. About the year 1760, difficulties existed between members of the first church in Coventry, and the Rev. Oliver Noble, their pastor. The following extract from the records of Windham Association affords evidence, satisfactory it is believed, that, for the settlement of those difficulties, the church proceeded, and was considered and treated, as a member of Consociation.

"At an Association of the ministers of the county of Windham, at Windham, first parish, May 21st, 1760 :

"The Association being requested to advise, Whether it be expedient, that the Consociation of the county should be called together to consider and judge of some matters of grievance alleged by a member of the first church and society in Coventry against their pastor, the Rev. Mr. Noble ; do accordingly advise, that, as Mr. Noble is providentially absent at present, the western committee be desired to meet, at some convenient time and place, and hear Mr. Noble and the aggrieved in reference to the expedience of calling said Consociation, and in pursuance thereof give their advice."

"The above is a true copy from the record of Windham Association."

"Attest,

LUDOVICUS WELD,

"Register of Windham Original Association."

Following, and near the date of this extract, there is a chasm in the records of that Association. Of course, nothing further appears upon them relative to that proposed Consociational council. The General Association will, however, perceive, whether it is possible to account for such an application and vote, if the first church in Coventry was not consociated with the churches in Windham county.

The convention of that Consociation, at the place and for the purpose already mentioned, and the substance of their result, are articles clearly remembered and confidently affirmed by witnesses now living. The committee regret their inability to find the original Minutes of that consociational council. They are probably extinct. At the same time, the committee are happy to state, that a paper purporting to be a copy of those Minutes has been obtained of an aged and reputable person in the first society of Coventry. Concerning this paper he "certifies, that it has been long in his possession as a copy of the doings of the Consociation." No good reason appears to doubt the correctness of the copy. But the committee deem it unnecessary to introduce extracts from this paper.

The General Association, with these facts in view, will probably not find it difficult to satisfy themselves, whether the first church in Coventry was consociated with the churches in Windham county; or whether it is credible, that an unconsociated church would ever submit its difficulties to a Consociation.

And here the committee beg leave to introduce a single remark. Many records of ecclesiastical proceedings in Connecticut, at that, and antecedent periods, and for a number of years following, are not to be found. Even the Minutes of the General Association, for the first thirty years, are probably, the greater part, if not the whole of them, lost. These unpleasant facts are ascribable, it is apprehended, chiefly, perhaps altogether, to the confusion produced by the revolutionary war.

In the present case, however, a fulness of evidence is furnished by memory and by the writings already mentioned, that, anterior to the formation of Tolland Consociation, the first church in Coventry was consociated with the churches in Windham county. The committee consider the fact as worthy of distinct recollection, because, to them, it appears to have an important bearing on the result of the inquiry which the General Association have instituted.

In August, 1789, the ministers of Tolland county, at a convention specially called for the purpose, formed themselves into an Association. From the formation of that county until the year 1789, they continued associated, and, with their churches, consociated, as they had been before the establishment of the county. The following extract from the Minutes of that convention will inform the General Association, whether they associated on the principles of agreement and discipline, which, for about eighty years, had been adopted through the State.

"The convention proceeded to deliberate on the subject of forming an Association in the county of Tolland; and unanimously voted to form into an Association on the same footing with sister Associations in the State of Connecticut; professing their adherence to the public formulas, and the general plan of ecclesiastical polity adopted in the Saybrook platform."

"The Association voted to meet twice annually; the time of meeting to be on the first Tuesday of June and October."

At the first meeting of the Association, which was in the October next following, provision was made for calling the first Consociation of the county. That provision was thus expressed in the act of the Association.

"Voted, That, in order to call the first Consociation in the county, the moderator of the last Association shall be empowered, by the advice of Association, or two members of the body, to issue Letters Missive to call the Consociation; and in the case of the moderator's death, or absence

of the moderator of the last Association, the last surviving moderator shall issue Letters Missive for that purpose."

By these documents the General Association will learn, whether the venerable Fathers and Brethren of Tolland county did regulate their proceedings, with admirable care and accuracy, by the Saybrook platform, in commencing their Association, and in providing for the permanent mutual council of a Consociation.

In 1790, the Tolland Consociation was formed and established. The following is a copy of a Letter Missive convoking the pastors and churches for that purpose. By this the General Association will discover, whether the procedure in the establishment of that body was according to usage among the churches of Connecticut guided by the construction which they have uniformly put upon their constitution.

"To the Rev. Pastor and church of Christ in North Bolton :

"REV. AND BELOVED,

"On application of the church and congregation in Willington to the Association of Tolland county, convened at Coventry, Oct. 5th, 1790, requesting, that the Consociation might be called to hear, judge, and determine, in all difficulties subsisting between the Rev. Gideon Noble and the people under his pastoral charge; The Association resolved, that the Consociation be called agreeably to their desire. This is, therefore, earnestly to request you, by your pastor and a delegate, to meet with the other churches in this county to form a Consociation for the purpose aforesaid in Willington, on the fifteenth day of November next, at 5 o'clock, P. M.—or, in case the public thanksgiving should be on that week, the Monday following, at the same hour.

"Signed, SAMUEL LOCKWOOD, Moderator.

Rev. Ebenezer Kellogg.

(To be communicated.)

"Coventry, Oct. 5th, 1790."

This Letter was ordered by the Association. "To form a Consociation" in the county, then new, was one of the purposes explicitly stated, for which that convention of the pastors and churches was requested. This Letter was communicated to the churches. The churches complied with the request which it contained; and they must have complied understandingly.

According to the request in this Letter, the Consociation was formed and organized. The first church in Coventry, by its pastor and delegate, made a constituent part of that consociational council. Its pastor, the late Dr. Huntington, was Scribe, and its delegate, the Hon. Jesse Root, late Chief Justice of the State, was assistant Scribe. The Rev. Gideon Noble was by that body, styling itself "an Ecclesiastical Consociation of the county of Tolland" tried and dismissed from his pastoral relation to the church and people of Willington.

Such are the facts. The statement is rendered unquestionable by the Minutes themselves of the Consociation.

That council, it is especially observable, *could* not be mutual, in any other sense but that in which a Consociation is *always*, by the agreement of the churches, a mutual council. For, it was not with the approbation of Mr. Noble, the defendant in the trial, that the Consociation was called. It was solely at the request of the church and society.

Mr. Noble had previously united with his accusers in the convention of a council mutually selected. By that council he had been tried and acquitted on some of the charges presented afterwards to the Consociation. Upon those he objected to a second trial either by the Consociation, or by any other council.

He offered his objections not only to his church when making their arrangements for procuring the mutual council of a Consociation, but to the Association, when the request of the church was under consideration in that body, and, last of all, to the Consociation when formed. But, in the fullest manner it is testified, that, neither by himself personally, nor by his counsel, was the regularity of the Consociation, or their jurisdiction in the case, doubted for a moment. But had the regularity of the Consociation been questionable, must not the circumstance have occurred to Mr. Noble, or to his advocates—and would they not have seized it with avidity?

This outline of facts the committee thought it necessary to report. It will, they trust, enable the General Association to decide, whether the mode of forming Tolland Consociation was according to the constitution and usage of the churches in Connecticut; and whether the first church in Coventry has been, from the formation of that Consociation, one of its members, and entitled to its privileges. For, if a minister of a county town, or two or three others, are authorized to issue Letters for the convocation of pastors and churches "to form a Consociation," the whole Association must, on a very obvious principle, have authority to order such Letters. And, if the first church in Coventry was in that vote to consociate, and did act with the body when formed and acting as a Consociation, the General Association will easily determine the past and present standing of that church.

No withdrawing act of that church is known. Some of its aged and very respectable members declare, that they remember no such act, and that they never heard of one. Their testimony is, that the church formerly considered itself, and was considered and treated by others, as a member of Windham Consociation; and since, for more than twenty years, of that in the county of Tolland.

2. The committee apprehend, that the following document will assist the General Association in determining the consociational standing of the late Rev. Abiel Abbot; and, of course, whether, according to the ecclesiastical constitution and usages of Connecticut, he was amenable, in the article of discipline, to that Consociation, of which his church claims to have been, and to continue a member.

"At a meeting of the Association of Tolland county, at the house of Mr. Abbot, Coventry, June 2d, 1801.

"A vote of the church of Marlboro was laid before the Association in the following words,

"Marlboro, Monday, March 24, 1800.

"The church met according to adjournment.

"Voted, That it is the desire of the church to be connected with the Consociation of churches in the county of Tolland.

"ELEAZER M'CRAY, *Church Clerk*.

"Upon which,

"Voted to comply with the desire of the church in Marlboro, expressed in their vote.

"Passed in Association,

JOHN WILLARD, *Moderator*,

"Attest, ABIEL ABBOT, *Scribe*.

"True record from the Minutes,

"Test, ABIEL ABBOT, *Register*."

The church in Marlboro had previously belonged to Hartford South. By the foregoing extract the General Association can, at once, decide, whether Mr. Abbot had the means of knowing, and must, indeed, have known, that the pastors and churches in Tolland county *did* consider themselves as consociated; and whether, if he disliked Consociations and the ecclesiastical constitution of Connecticut, he had sufficient opportunities of manifesting his dislike.

The committee have discovered no evidence of his having ever intimated, that he considered either himself or his church as unassociated, until after those difficulties had arisen, which issued in acts of Consociation dissolving his pastoral connection, and revoking his ministerial powers and authority.

3. The committee trust, that, by the preceding statements, the General Association may satisfy themselves concerning the correctness of the procedure described in the subsequent extract.

"At a meeting of the Association of Tolland county, in Willington, Oct. 2d, 1810—

"The first church in Coventry, under the pastoral care of the Rev. Abiel Abbot, by their committee, the Hon. Messrs. Jesse Root and David Hale, applied to the Association for advice in relation to difficulties existing between them and their pastor, which difficulties are stated in a communication on file.

"The Association having taken the matter into deliberate and solemn consideration, and having used due endeavors to obtain light, do give advice to the church, that, the previous steps having been taken, they take proper measures for the convening of the council of the consociated churches in Tolland county, according to the articles for the administration of church discipline agreed upon by the delegation in the general council at Saybrook, Sept. 9, 1708."

It appears that the church indulged no unnecessary delay in complying with this advice. Individuals by private dealing, and the church itself, with great intelligence and integrity, pursued the course which the gospel directs. With many anxious feelings, and with much circumspection, they proceeded to prepare the way for the convention of the Consociation—reluctantly apprehending that such a measure *might* finally be necessary. They labored diligently and for many months to convince their pastor, and to restore that harmony which they sincerely desired.

On many accounts they esteemed their pastor—and often repeated and earnest were their exertions to preserve him, if possible, consistently with their duty to Christ.

But, in their view, he had embraced and taught opinions contrary to the gospel, subversive of the Christian foundation and hope, and consequently perilous to souls. Every consideration of personal attachment must therefore yield. The demands of duty to their Lord and Master were imperious.

For the settlement of difficulties Mr. Abbot proposed a council equally selected by the parties at variance. The church met him upon his proposition. In a vote of the church it was resolved expressly to join with Mr. Abbot and the society in convening a mutual council, "provided we shall be able to agree with him and the society on the churches from which such council shall be called." Is it seriously supposeable, that Mr. Abbot ever did, or *could*, desire a mutual council upon any other conditions?

By the unequivocal tenor of this vote, it will be evident to the General Association, whether the church was not as ready and as willing as Mr. Abbot himself could be, to submit the whole cause to a council thus selected. The parties proceeded to the nomination of such a council. But, as might be expected, neither of them would yield the advantage of a majority. All efforts for the attainment of a mutual council thus formed were therefore ineffectual. The very obvious consequence was anticipated. A council composed of numbers equal on both sides of a question, concerning a point of doctrine believed, by at least one of them, essential to the scheme of grace and salvation revealed in the gospel, must, of course, be utterly unavailing.

The church was, therefore, impelled to its ultimate resort. It had no means of relief from suffering the calamity of having a pastor, in its own

view, essentially heretical, but by an appeal to Consociation—that permanent mutual and most impartial council, so happily provided by the ecclesiastical constitution of Connecticut, and at all times, equally ready for the benefit of either party, when no other mutual council, that can be of use, is found attainable.

But, upon this point, the committee will not occupy the time of the General Association. A very able and satisfactory account of the steps taken by the church is already before the public in a statement made by the church, and published in the “Reply by the Tolland Association.” To that publication the committee cheerfully refer their Rev. fathers and brethren.

4. The church, thus convinced, that there was no possible method of bringing its difficulties to an impartial hearing and decision, but the last, provided so expressly by the constitution, applied, as stated above, for the consociational council.

The following is a copy of the Letter Missive by which that council was convoked. By this the General Association will be satisfied, whether the procedure was strictly regular.

“To the pastor of the first church of Christ in Hebron, and to said church :

“REV. AND BELOVED,

“Whereas matters of difficulty subsist in the first church of Christ in Coventry, respecting their pastor, the Rev. Abiel Abbot, which need the assistance of an ecclesiastical council; and application having been made to us, the subscribers, pastors of the church in Tolland and of Vernon, by said church to convoke the Consociation of the county of Tolland to afford their assistance for quieting and settling those difficulties :

“We do hereby request the pastor of the first church of Christ in Hebron, and also said church by a delegate appointed for that purpose, to meet the other ministers and churches within this county, at the dwelling house of Mr. Frederic Rose in said Coventry, on the sixteenth day of April next, at 11 o'clock, A. M. and, with them in council, to hear and decide on any matter regularly brought before them, and to do whatever shall to them appear most conducive to the peace and good order of said church, and tending to promote pure and undefiled religion.

“Signed,

NATHAN WILLIAMS,
EBENEZER KELLOGG.

“Vernon, March 21st, 1811.”

In compliance with this request the Consociation convened. With the substance of their result the General Association are already acquainted. Of the committee, however, a report of particulars may be expected.—The following is a copy of their Minutes :

“At a meeting of the elders and messengers of the churches in the county of Tolland, on the 16th of April, 1811, in the first society in Coventry, called at the request of the church in said society, were present, Rev. pastors, Nathan Williams, D. D. Ebenezer Kellogg, Amos Bassett, Royal Tyler, Diodate Brockway, Nathan Gillet, Ephraim T. Woodruff, Hubbel Loomis, and William L. Strong.

“Delegates from the churches; Deacons, Jabez Kingsbury, Oliver King, Stephen Bingham, Sylvester Gilbert, Sawyer Ellis, Joseph Talcott, Samuel Dunton, Jabez Collins, Elijah Talcott, Rev. Calvin Ingals, Mr. John Hall.

“Doct. Williams was chosen moderator, and Mr. Bassett scribe.

“The Consociation was opened with prayer, by the moderator.

“The church laid before this body a complaint, containing the following articles of charge against their pastor, viz.

"That he, the Rev. Abiel Abbot, does neither preach nor believe the doctrine of the sacred Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in the Godhead.

"That he does neither preach, nor believe in, the divinity of Jesus Christ ; that he is both God and man united in the person of Mediator.

"That he does neither preach nor believe the doctrine of the atonement made for sin by the blood of Christ, and of the justification of sinners by the righteousness of Christ, imputed to them and received by faith in him.

"The foregoing doctrines, though clearly revealed in the word of God, as not only true, but fundamental in the gospel system, and essential to be believed in order to salvation, are by him omitted in his preaching : and doctrines contrary to these, and repugnant to the faith once delivered to the saints, by Christ and his apostles, and subversive of the Christian's hope, are by him taught and inculcated."

"Mr. Abbot having read, then presented to this body an address, denying the jurisdiction of this council, and protesting against their sitting in judgment upon the complaint against him.

"The society also by their committee, presented an instrument of the same purport, which was read.

"The authority of the Consociation having been denied, the subject was largely argued by the counsel both of Mr. Abbot and of the church.

"The counsel then proceeded to a full deliberation upon the arguments offered. The question was then put by the moderator, Do this council consider themselves duly convened and authorized to try the complaint before them ? Voted in the affirmative.

"The elders and messengers present feel themselves justified and supported in the foregoing decision by the articles of church discipline, unanimously agreed upon by the elders and all the churches of Connecticut convened at Saybrook, September 9th, 1708 : the same having been adopted by practice and consent in this county ; and for that, this Consociation is convoked conformably to the 13th article thereof, and agreeably to the usage of the churches in this State ; and, as we believe, agreeably to the mind and will of Christ ; and, for that, no other method of administering church discipline has been adopted among our churches in cases like the one under consideration ; nor can we resort to any other, under the present organization of our churches, where the parties cannot, or will not, mutually submit their difficulties.

"The Rev. Mr. Abbot was then called upon to answer to the complaint exhibited against him by the church ; but he neglected and refused to make answer to the same.

"The council then proceeded to hear the testimony produced by the church in support of the articles of charge. After a full and patient hearing and consideration of the case, the question was put upon each article separately, Is this article proved ? Voted, It is proved.

"The general question was then put, Is the Rev. Abiel Abbot guilty of the facts alleged in the complaint of the church against him ? Voted unanimously in the affirmative.

"Voted, That the man who neither believes nor preaches the doctrines specified in the articles of charge, is disqualified for the office of the gospel ministry ; for he has essentially renounced the scriptures, has made shipwreck of the faith once delivered to the saints, has denied the Messiah of the gospel, who is the true God and eternal life, and cannot preach to sinners, according to the real meaning of scripture, Jesus Christ and him crucified, who is the only way of salvation, nor feed the church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood.

"The council therefore feel themselves required by Jesus Christ the great God and Saviour, on the peril of being judged unfaithful to him, to his church, and the best interests of the society in this place, to declare,

and they hereby declare, that the ministerial relation between the Rev. Abiel Abbot, and the first church of Christ in Coventry ought to be, and is, dissolved. And they do hereby also revoke the commission given to him by his ordination to preach the gospel and administer the ordinances of the same.

"The council add, that after having given full weight to every thing brought before them, it is with pain they have found themselves under the necessity of performing this indispensable duty.

"By unanimous order of the Consociation,

"Signed,

"Attest,

NATHAN WILLIAMS, *Moderator*,
AMOS BASSETT, *Scribe*."

This, the General Association will observe, closes the historical statement required of the committee, relative to the former part of the inquiry which they have been directed to make. They have endeavored to exhibit all the facts which, to them, seemed essential to an impartial and discriminating decision. Their way—though laborious—has been clear. They have no apprehension, that the accuracy of the statement will be controverted.

5. The General Association are well aware, that in New-England, there are persons who differ from most of the churches concerning even the fundamentals of revealed religion, and concerning the modes of ecclesiastical government and discipline authorized in the word of God.

Those few—whatever may be the *real* articles of their faith,—it might be expected, would differ from the consociational council, in their inferences from the facts here reported. They *have* thus differed—and their opinion, solemnly given, is before the public.

But what are the only *correct* inferences? This seems to be the question before the General Association—if question here there *can* be. All, it is apprehended, will agree, that the question must be decided by the constitution, doctrines, and usages, which the churches in Connecticut generally believe to be according to the word of God.

From that constitution, those doctrines, and usages, did the Consociation deduce just inferences respecting themselves, the first church in Coventry, and its late pastor?

That the General Association may the more easily and correctly satisfy themselves, the committee ask leave to lay before them here, in the interrogatory form, a summary of the whole cause, from its commencement to the close of the consociational result.

Was the Consociation of Tolland county ever regularly formed?

Allowing that it was, does it continue to be, as the constitution provides, a mutual council for the benefit of all its members?

When a church has once consociated, has uniform practice treated it as *continuing* consociated, until, either by its own act, it shall have declared itself no longer such, or shall have been cut off by a disciplinary act of Consociation?

Has the first church in Coventry been, and does it continue to be, by its own choice expressed in a number of regular acts, a member of Tolland Consociation, and holding a clear right to demand the assistance of that Body, when necessary?

Has it, within the last half century, been the usage of ordaining councils, generally, in Connecticut, to require of the candidate a *formal* assent to the ecclesiastical constitution and discipline adopted by most of the churches?

Or rather, Has it been reasonably taken for granted, on the supposition of the candidate's intelligence and prudence, that, preparatory to his determining whether to take the pastoral charge in this State or not, he would thoroughly inform himself concerning that constitution and the usages grounded upon it—that, if he disliked the one, or the other, or

both, he would; either at his ordination, or afterwards, *before* accusations were discovered to be rising against him, inform his brethren of his dissent—making it known by this act, that he will not hold himself amenable to Consociation?

Has it been the understanding and usage of the churches, that the free declaration of such dissent shall make no schism between himself and his brethren?

If he declare no such dissent, has it been assumed uniformly, and therefore by just inference in every case, that he *adopts* the constitution—holding himself, in the way it prescribes, amenable for misconduct and heresy, and bound to submit to every decision of discipline which it authorizes?

Must the late Rev. Abiel Abbot—from the manner in which the request of the church in Marlboro' was twelve years ago received and treated by the Association, and repeatedly entered upon their Minutes by himself, as both scribe and register—have certainly and sufficiently known, that the pastors and churches of that county did consider themselves consociated?

Must he, of course, have known perfectly well, that both himself and his church were considered in as regular and complete consociational standing, as any other pastor and church in the county or State?

As he never declared any dissent until difficulties began to place themselves in a threatening attitude—when, upon every correct principle, such dissent became utterly inadmissible—was he, in reality, a member of Consociation; and consequently, was it with perfect equity, that he was treated as amenable to Consociation, and under their jurisdiction?

Is it, in any association of professing Christians, a violation of charity and right, to define, describe, and denounce, the sentiments which, according to *their* understanding of the revealed system, are heretical?

Has the denial, that Jesus Christ is more than a creature, been by the consociated churches uniformly believed to be a “damnable heresy”, and in the highest degree opposed to the first principles, on which those churches confederated?

Is evangelical fellowship possible between those who believe, that Jesus Christ is the everliving God, and those who believe that he is not—the difference between the objects of their faith respectively, being no less than the difference between a creature, and Him, “who is over all, God blessed for ever?”

As the Consociation were unanimously convinced of Mr. Abbot's denial, that Jesus Christ is more than a creature, did their duty to their Saviour, and to souls, indispensably require them—according to their united understanding of the scripture doctrine—to dissolve his pastoral connection, and to take back his ministerial commission?

Were their acts, of such import and intent, valid to close effectually his pastoral standing, and to render it improper for the churches and people of God to consider him any longer as a minister of the gospel?

Did such acts imply any want of Christian charity—or any claim to a right of binding Mr. Abbot's conscience, or that of any other person in matters of opinion?

Have a number of professing Christians, united either by express or implicit agreement, not only in the belief of particular doctrines, but in the manner of defining those doctrines, a right to put an end to religious fellowship between themselves, and any one of their number, whom they convict of renouncing what they consider a fundamental principle of their agreement?

Would a Consociation be chargeable with lording it over the conscience of an atheist, detected in their body, were they to resolve to consider him no longer in their communion?

Does obedience to that inspired rule of discipline, “A man that is a

heretic, after the first and second admonition, reject," imply any claim, in those who reject him, to bind his conscience in matters of faith?

Is this rejection the setting up of human phrases and formularies, and creeds, instead of scripture, as the standard of faith?

Or is it, rather, a pious and resolute adherence to their own unanimous understanding of scripture, and an honest defence of that, which the heretic himself *had*, as they understood, agreed with them to consider as "the faith once delivered to the saints?"

And finally, Is the heresy, embraced by Mr. Abbot, as has been often exultingly intimated, a recent and precious improvement in theology—the fruit of deep research, conducted by superior learning and talents? Or is it a delusion of ancient date, invented under the impulse of a "love for darkness rather than light"—fostered by "philosophy falsely so called"—a daring attempt to throw aside "the stone which has become the head of the corner—that Stone, upon which whosoever shall fall shall be broken, but which, upon whomsoever it shall fall, shall grind him to powder?"

In the view of the committee, these particulars form a summary of the things, especially claiming attention in the former part of this inquiry.

6. Mr. Abbot did not acquiesce in the result of Consociation. His protest against their jurisdiction has been already mentioned. In that laborious production he assumed the task of proving—however clearly the light of facts to the contrary might have been shining upon him for more than fifteen years—that there was no Consociation in the county of Tolland; that the first church in Coventry and its pastor belonged to no Consociation whatever; that his church had no right to the interference of such a council; and, therefore, that the pastor and churches calling themselves a Consociation, convened at the request of his church, were no other than an *ex parte* council, having, of course, no legitimate jurisdiction in the case.

Upon these points, it has already been seen, the deliberate judgment of the Consociation was the reverse of the opinions expressed in the protest.

Mr. Abbot also labored abundantly, and hard, to demonstrate the equivocal proposition, "that councils have no authority in matters of faith."

Did he mean, that councils are not authorized to take away a man's right of judging for himself concerning articles of doctrine?—Or that Christ has given them no physical power to bind the conscience, and compel the mind honestly to receive, as true, that which it really believes to be false? He might wisely have spared himself the trouble of writing, and that council the time of hearing, arguments in defence of the proposition. Between himself and the consociated pastors and churches of Connecticut, there was here no difference of opinion. Must he not have been well acquainted with this fact? Can he have been ignorant, that none of them have the folly to imagine themselves, in *such* a sense, clothed "with authority in matters of faith?" Can the insinuation implied in the proposition, that our councils ever pretend to claim and exercise such authority, have been honestly intended? Or was it rather a mere slander, devised and thrown out to divert the inquiring mind from the investigation of truth? The general Association will judge.

But did he intend, that councils have no authority to determine for themselves what heresy is? Or to reject, from their Christian fellowship and communion, a man whom, on evidence irresistible, they *believe* to be a heretic? If this was his meaning, how could an agreement between him and our Consociation be more possible, than between Belial and Christ—than between gross infidelity and an affectionate faith in the gospel?

If councils are not authorized to determine for themselves, that the man who affirms, "that Jesus Christ has derived all from the Father," is, accord-

ding to *their* understanding of the scriptures, a heretic—one who denies the faith which is unto salvation—who shall determine for them?

Does the gospel recognize the existence of heresy in the world? Does the Holy Ghost expressly forbid its toleration, when known in the church? If churches and councils may not determine, for themselves, the article of heresy, and, as Christians, reject the man who avows it, how shall they obey the very explicit commandment of God?

The committee make no apology for thus suspending their narrative, a moment, in this place. They thought it necessary, that a just and clear view of the whole subject might be kept in mind.

Mr. Abbot professed to disregard the dismissing and disqualifying acts of the Consociation. He continued, several weeks after their result was published, to practise the *forms* of the ministerial office.

In the mean time, a Letter, purporting to express the *mutual* wish of himself and the society, was sent to sundry pastors and churches in Massachusetts, requesting their attendance as a *mutual* council to consider his ministerial standing and character.

Below, is an attested copy of that Letter. It was seasonably communicated to the committee of the church under the following inclosure.

"Brethren,

"Inclosed is a copy of a Letter to convoke an ecclesiastical council; and I would hereby notify you, and the church through you, of the meeting of said council, that if you see cause, you may unite with me and the society in asking their advice, or may make any representation before said council which you, or the church may deem proper.

"Most sincerely yours in our common Lord.

"ABIEL ABBOT.

"Coventry, May 17, 1811."

Hon. JESSE ROOT,
Deacon DAVID HALE,
Brother HEZEKIAH EDGERTON,

} Committee of the first church in
} Coventry for convening the Con-
} sociation of Tolland county.

"To the Rev. Elder and the church of Christ in of
which the Rev. is pastor.

"REV. AND BELOVED,

"In consequence of difference in matters of opinion between the pastor and the first church in Coventry, and of the failure of all conciliatory measures, on the part of the pastor and society, a council purporting to be the Consociation of Tolland county, has been convened by the church, which, notwithstanding the united protest of the pastor and society, has proceeded to dissolve the pastoral relation of Mr. Abbot to the first church in Coventry, and to disqualify him as a minister of Jesus Christ.—This state of things, and these difficulties we very sensibly feel, and most sincerely deplore. In these circumstances, the pastor and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry—the church having declined a mutual council, earnestly solicit the advice and direction of an ecclesiastical council, to which they desire to submit the standing of the pastor, and the expediency of his continuing in the ministry in this place; and they hereby authorize the council to dissolve his pastoral relation to this people, if deemed expedient, in such standing in the church and ministry, as shall be judged proper; and, generally, to give their advice and direction in all matters which may properly come before them.

"We, therefore, the pastor and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, earnestly request the attendance of the Elder and a messenger of your church in council, at the house of the Rev. Mr. Abbot in Coventry, on Wednesday, the 5th day June next, at 11 o'clock A. M. to consider, advise, and direct concerning the above premises.

"Rev. and Beloved, we wish you grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Signed,

ABIEL ABBOT, *Pastor.*

AMASA JONES, *for the Society.*

"Coventry, April 26, 1811.

"The Rev.

To be communicated." }

"P. S. The Elders and a messenger from each of their churches invited to meet in council, are the Rev. Dr. Lathrop, of Boston, Drs. Barnard and Prince, of Salem, Dr. Osgood, of Medford, Dr. Reed, of Bridgewater, Dr. Porter, of Roxbury, Dr. Bancroft, of Worcester, Dr. Kendal, of Weston, Rev. Mr. Allyn, of Duxborough, and Rev. Mr. Thayer, of Lancaster.

"(Copy.) The above and foregoing is a true copy of the Letter and the copy of a Letter Missive signed by Mr. Abiel Abbot, pastor, and Amasa Jones for the society, to convoke an ecclesiastical council, addressed to and lodged with me to be communicated to the church, enclosed,

"Test, JESSE ROOT."

The society acted uniformly, with Mr. Abbot, refusing Consociation, but willing to join their pastor and the church in submitting their difficulties to a council mutually chosen, if the parties could agree in the choice. It has been already seen that the church were not less willing than Mr. Abbot to have the cause decided by a council of that description. But, for reasons arising from the nature of the difficulties, no such council could be convened with the prospect of efficiency. The course which the church—the agrieved party—therefore took, has been stated.

There is some *appearance*, at least, of the society's concurrence in calling the foreign council of June 5th. The following is an attested copy of votes shewing the manner in which the society transacted.

"At a society meeting legally warned and held at the meeting house in Coventry, first society, on the 13th of Nov. 1810.

"The Hon. JESSE ROOT, Esq. chosen moderator.

"Voted, 1st. In consequence of difficulties subsisting in the church with Mr. Abbot, that if Mr. Abbot and the church see fit, this society will unite with Mr. Abbot and the church in convening a mutual council, for the purpose of considering, advising, and deciding, in all matters of difficulty subsisting in the church with Mr. Abbot.

"Voted, 3dly, to appoint a committee who are hereby authorized to agree with the church and Mr. Abbot in a mutual council, and to do what is necessary to convene said council, and to manage the concerns of the society before said council, if convened.

"4thly, Voted, that Messrs. Amasa Jones, Jephth Fitch, Nathan Howard, and Cephas Brigham, be a committee for the aforesaid purpose.

"5thly, Voted, that in case the church or Mr. Abbot should decline agreeing in a mutual council, and the council of the consociated churches of Tolland county should be convened, the above named committee are directed to take all necessary and prudent means to manage the concerns of this society according to their discretion.

"6thly, Voted, that the above named committee are also authorized, if by them judged expedient, to unite with Mr. Abbot in convening a mutual council to consider and decide upon such matters as may be thought necessary to be laid before them.

"The above is a true copy of the original,

"Test, BILDAD CURTIS, *Society Clerk.*

"Coventry, Oct. 5th, 1811."

"At an annual society meeting legally warned and held at the meeting house, Coventry, first society, April 15th, 1811.

"Hon. JESSE ROOT, Esq. chosen moderator.

"1st. Calvin Manning, Jun. Joseph Dow, and James White were chosen committee for the year ensuing.

"3dly. Voted, that the standing committee join the committee chosen, the 15th of Nov. last, in managing the concerns of said society, with full powers to act with the committee then chosen.

"The above is a true copy of the original.

"Test, BILDAD CURTIS, *Society Clerk.*

Coventry, Oct. 5th, 1811."

Such were the arrangements of the society. They entrusted the whole management of their concerns to a large and respectable committee, under the limitations here expressed.

The number and doings of the second council may be seen in the following copy of their minutes.

"Coventry, June 5th, 1811.

"In pursuance of Letters Missive from the pastor and first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, the following elders and messengers assembled at the house of the Rev. Abiel Abbot.

Boston,	<i>Rev. John Lathrop, D. D.</i>
Bridgewater,	<i>Rev. John Reed, D. D.</i>
Roxbury,	<i>Rev. Eliphalet Porter, D. D.</i>
Worcester,	<i>Rev. Aaron Bancroft, D. D. and Deac. Wm. Trowbridge,</i>
Weston,	<i>Rev. Samuel Kendall, D. D. and Brother Isaac Hobbs.</i>
Duxborough,	<i>Rev. John Allyn,</i>
Lancaster,	<i>Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, and Brother Josiah Bridge.</i>

"The council formed by chusing Rev. John Lathrop, D. D. moderator, and Rev. Nathaniel Thayer, scribe.

"Voted, that the Rev. Mr. Abbot and the committee of the society be informed, that the council are now in session, and are ready to receive any communications from them.

"Voted, that the following message be sent to the deacons of the church, to be communicated.

"An ecclesiastical council, of which the Rev. John Lathrop, D. D. is moderator, is now in session in this place, at the request of the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry, and will be happy to receive from the first church in Coventry any communications they may be pleased to lay before them.

"Coventry, June 5th, 1811.

"N. B. The council have voted to adjourn to the meeting house, and will be in session this afternoon, at 2 o'clock.

"To deacons *Nathan Howard and David Hale.*

"To this message no reply has been made.

"Voted, to adjourn to 2 o'clock this afternoon, then to meet at the meeting house.

"Assembled at the meeting house agreeably to adjournment.

"The Rev. moderator led in an address to the throne of divine grace. Attended to various communications of the Rev. Mr. Abbot, and of the advocate for the society, in order as appears on file, and from these learned the measures adopted by the church and society in relation to existing difficulties.

"After hearing the arguments on the part of the society, attended to some paragraphs of a sermon of the late President Stiles on "the Christian union." These displayed the nature of Consecrations, the indepen-

dence of the New England churches, and the spirit of Christian liberty.

"Voted to adjourn to the house of the Rev. Abiel Abbot, there to meet at the expiration of one hour.

"Met at the time appointed.

"Chose Rev. Drs. Lathrop, Reed, Porter, Bancroft, and the Rev. Mr. Thayer a committee to prepare a result.

"Voted that the council adjourn to to-morrow at 7 o'clock, A. M.

"June 6. Convened at the hour assigned.

"The council having taken into consideration the Christian and ministerial standing of the Rev. Abiel Abbot, and the expediency of his continuing in the ministry, voted unanimously to publish the following result.

"It is with reluctance that the members of this council have consented to take any part in relation to the unhappy divisions which have arisen in this place, and which more immediately respect the Christian edification, peace and order of the churches in this vicinity and state. We feel ourselves impelled, however, by a principle of sympathy and benevolence, and by a sense of duty to our common Lord and Master, not to refuse our attention, opinions and advice when they are earnestly solicited by a respectable ecclesiastical society, and a Christian pastor who received his education and approbation as a preacher of the gospel in that part of the country in which we reside, and whom we have long known, respected and loved.

"This council have, as they trust, attended with seriousness and impartiality to the statements and pleas of the parties at whose instance they are convened. They lament the divisions which have arisen between the church on one side, and the pastor and congregation on the other. It is with extreme reluctance that the council are constrained to give an opinion which will militate with the result of the venerable council composed of elders and messengers of the churches of Tolland county, recently convoked in this place; but as it becomes necessary that they should decide on questions submitted to their deliberation, propriety requires that they give the reasons of their decision.

"The council find no satisfactory evidence that a Consociation ever existed in Tolland county, according to Saybrook platform. If a Consociation did exist, they find no evidence, that the first church in Coventry or its pastor were ever constituent parts of it; and as the Rev. Mr. Abbot and the ecclesiastical society declined acting with this church in calling the late council, and protested against its jurisdiction, we can consider it only in the light of an ex parte council; and as the not having of a mutual council as the umpire of their controversy must in our opinion be imputed to the church, the result of said council cannot affect the ministerial standing of the Rev. Mr. Abbot, much less dissolve the pastoral relation between him and this people.

"Concerning the doctrinal points which are the only articles of charge alleged against Mr. Abbot we will not decide, in the persuasion that the Great Head of the church never empowered any body of men to pronounce authoritatively respecting religious opinions. We believe that Mr. Abbot is sincere in the following solemn declaration, and that ought to be satisfactory.

"There is one God, the Father, of whom are all things; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things. Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

"Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the brightness of the Father's glory and express image of his person; and in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He was declared to be the Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by the resurrection from the dead. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins.

"There is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man

Christ Jesus. He hath suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. In him we have redemption through his blood; he was delivered for our offences, and raised again for our justification: By him we believe in God, that raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God.

"After that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost; that being justified by his grace we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. To him that believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

"I acknowledge and sincerely receive the sacred scriptures as divine truth, and firmly believe and preach them as an infallible guide of faith and duty. And while I claim for myself the right of searching and judging their true meaning, I disclaim the right of binding others by my interpretations, and of condemning them for differing in opinion from me."

"We are persuaded that his inquiries have been in the love of truth, and his sentiments communicated in the spirit of the Christian; and we will not set at nought our brother for the exercise of the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, for we must all stand at his judgment seat. The pages of ecclesiastical history through a period of eighteen hundred years contain abundant evidence, that the attempt to unite Christians under human creeds and formularies has uniformly issued in a struggle for superiority, in the alienation of Christian brethren, and in divisions in the church: Is it not then time, that the disciples of one common Master unite under his authority, and make his gospel without addition or diminution the basis of ministerial intercourse and Christian communion? The sufficiency of the scriptures as a rule of faith and practice is the great principle of the reformation from popery, and it is the only ground on which protestant Christians can securely stand.

"The council consider the relation between the pastor and this ecclesiastical society as not having been annulled; and the parties having submitted the expediency of its continuance to this council, we do, therefore, adjudge that the relation between them be dissolved for the reasons which follow:

"We apprehend that the divisions which exist in the church and society are of such a nature, as render it highly improbable, that the end of the Christian ministry can in future be promoted by the official labors of Mr. Abbot. As it respects the church and society, we entertain the hope that this act of Christian condescension of the majority to the ardent wishes of the minority will be the means to restore their former harmony and love, and that in the spirit of mutual forbearance and charity they will be united in a minister by whom they all may be edified. This measure we deem necessary for the future comfort and usefulness of the pastor, and in conformity to the will of our divine Master, that his ministers who cannot be useful in one city flee to another.

"And therefore, being authorized as aforesaid, we do hereby declare the relation between the Rev. Abiel Abbot and the first ecclesiastical society in Coventry dissolved.

"This council unreservedly express their favorable opinion of the ministerial qualifications of the Rev. Mr. Abbot. His intellectual powers, his literary and theological attainments, the diligence of his research after truth, his prudence, candor, and charity, the excellence of his moral character, and his affability and tenderness in the intercourse with the people of his charge, in our view fit him in a high degree for the office of a Christian pastor; and with deep sorrow we find that circumstances exist, which render it expedient for him to take a dismission from a society, the great majority of whom manifest a warm attachment to his person and ministry. This council cordially recommend the Rev. Mr.

Abbot to all Christian societies among whom he may in divine providence be called to minister.

"This council did not cross the line of their State with an inclination to oppose themselves to their Christian brethren in Connecticut; but, as they trust, in the spirit of that gospel, which has made charity the distinguishing mark of its disciples. They will themselves, and in expressing this sentiment they are assured that they speak the language of their brethren in Massachusetts, rejoice to co-operate in all measures which are fitted to promote Christian union and fellowship, as well as in those which subserve the purposes of the civil and literary institutions of the two sister States.

"The council subjoin their earnest supplications to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ that He would have this Christian people and him who hath long labored with them in word and doctrine, in his holy keeping, and grant them the blessings of the gospel of peace. May this his servant be again honored and improved in the work of the ministry.

"May we all, having passed through this state of imperfection and trial, meet in heaven, where we shall see as we are seen, and be perfected in the whole will of God.

"JOHN LATHROP, *Moderator.*

"Attest. NATHANIEL THAYER. *Scribe.*"

The General Association have now before them a full view of the council of Massachusetts. This branch of "the proceedings," concerning which the committee were directed to inquire and report, seems, on several accounts, to demand attention.

1. The circumstance, that the council of June 5th was from another state, appears to claim notice. Are the reasons offered by the council itself satisfactory? Could the "earnest request" of two men, and sympathy with one of them, or a sense of duty, in this peculiar case, furnish a reason sufficient to justify the members of this council in obtruding their opinions, relative to ecclesiastical proceedings in this state? And especially in resolving, that such proceedings were inefficacious and void? Will it be believed, that the churches of Connecticut are less able, or less willing, than strangers, to distinguish between order and irregularity in things pertaining to their own institutions?

But precedent has been urged—not, indeed, by this council, but by Mr. Abbot—in justification of the measure. The legislature of Connecticut once interfered, and directed discordant parties in Hartford to look for assistance to a council from Massachusetts.

Can that event have been mentioned with the real belief, that it was parallel, in any important point, with the call and coming of this council? It was not far from one hundred and fifty years ago. It was, therefore, long before the period, in which the churches of Connecticut adopted their present constitutional bond of union. It was about half a century before any system of agreement and discipline was received, securing to the pastors and churches mutual assistance in a way well known to all, and rendered orderly by general consent.

But has the *real* reason of a measure so irregular and extraordinary been kept back? Was it, that the members of this council were known to symbolize in *sentiment* with Mr. Abbot in "denying the Lord that bought them?"

2. This council declared null and void the solemn decision of a Consociation. Was this because a Consociation is not the most impartial council that can be collected, and better acquainted with the difficulties and best interests of the churches within their own limits, than any company of strangers can be? And what opinion will candor form of the professions made by this council of respect and affection for the consociated pastors and churches—and of a readiness to co-operate in the promotion of religion and literature?

3. This council passed the form of dismissing Mr. Abbot from the *society*, but not from the *church*. Was this because the Holy Ghost has established the pastoral connection—not between a minister of the gospel and his church—but between him and those that do not, before men, profess to believe, and covenant to obey the gospel?

Further. If, as this council have decreed, the doings of the Consociation were null and void, is not Mr. Abbot *now* the pastor of the first church in Coventry? He was ordained pastor of that *church*.

4. The Letter Missive purports to contain a *mutual* request of Mr. Abbot and the society. But how can he and the society have been two parties in the present case? They are represented as perfectly agreed, and strongly attached to each other. How, then, can they have been parties, having differences, and difficulties, to lay before a council?

There is yet another circumstance here, which needs explanation. By the votes of the society, it appears, that *seven* men constituted their committee. These were empowered to act for the society according to their discretion. But, of these seven, only *one* name appears on the Letter. Did his signature express the wishes, or was it placed there by the order of the other six?

The committee of the General Association have found no vote authorizing one of the seven to act for the whole. Were the other six aware, that the proceedings of Mr. Abbot in calling this council were altogether indecorous and absurd? Did they, therefore, and with great propriety, refuse to act in an affair, so unprecedented, and idle? If so, can the society be justly said to have had any voice at all in collecting this council, so confidently claiming to be mutual? Must the members of this council have come into Connecticut and formed their sympathetic result with a certain knowledge of these circumstances?

The committee have now laid before their Rev. fathers and brethren all the facts which, to them, seemed relevant to the subject of inquiry. Praying that the General Association may be guided by "the wisdom which is from above," and that "all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity" may have grace to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints," they subscribe, in the faith and fellowship of the gospel.

NATHAN PERKINS, }
ABEL FLINT, } Committee.
CALVIN CHAPIN, }

Hartford, May 13, 1812.

The Rev. Messrs. Timothy Dwight, D. D. Lyman Beecher, and Rufus Anderson were appointed a Committee, to examine the preceding report, to draw up, for the consideration of this Association, such votes as may be proper to be passed by the Association on the authority of the statement contained in it, and to make report to this body.

The above named Committee reported sundry resolutions, which were adopted by the Association, as follows:

Resolved, 1. That the Consociation of Tolland County was regularly formed, when they dismissed and deposed the late Rev. Abiel Abbot.

Resolved, 2. That the first Church in Coventry is a member of Tolland Consociation, and has been such from the formation of that body.

Resolved, 3. That the late Rev. Abiel Abbot was, of right, considered and treated as belonging and amenable to Tolland Consociation.

Resolved, 4. That in the late proceedings at Coventry, the Elders and Churches of Tolland County have, in the opinion of the General Association, borne a judicious, faithful, and highly commendable testimony to the truth as it is in Jesus.

Resolved, 5. That, according to the firm belief of this General Association, a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ is heresy.

• *Resolved, 6.* That the exclusion from Christian communion, and from the ministerial office, for heresy, is neither an attempt to bind the conscience in matters of faith, nor a violation of Christian charity; but an act, which that charity imperiously demands; and an article of discipline, which the principles of agreement among the consociated Churches require them to perform.

Resolved, 7. That the General Association view, with much surprise and regret, the coming and the acts of the Council at Coventry, on the 5th day of June, 1811.

Resolved 8. That the mere want of "*satisfactory evidence, that a Consociation ever existed in Tolland County*" furnished no justifying reason to the Council of June 5th, for acting at all in the affairs of Mr. Abbot and his congregation; both because the Council had no sufficient means in their power of determining this fact, and because the mere want of evidence cannot be a foundation for acting in any case, especially in a case of such importance.

Resolved, 9. That it is inconsistent with all principles of ecclesiastical order for Ministers and Churches, belonging to another body, and another State, to act, as an ecclesiastical Council, in the affairs of any consociated Church in this State, without a previous request, or, at least, consent, of the Consociation with which such Church is connected, formally declared.

Resolved, 10. That a profession of faith, made in the words of scripture, is no definite exhibition of the real faith of the professor: since all persons, who acknowledge the divine origin of the scriptures, would, although some of them are in their faith directly opposed to others, make the same profession in the same words.

Resolved, 11. That the decision of the Council, "that the relation between Mr. Abbot and the ecclesiastical Society, with which he was connected, was not annulled by the act of Tolland Consociation," was a decision which the Council was not authorized to make: since they had neither power nor right to examine the proceedings of the Consociation; nor to sit as judges over that ecclesiastical judicatory; and since, if they had had such right, these proceedings were not before them, nor was the Consociation either heard or represented.

Resolved, 12. That the circumstances under which the Council of June 5th was convened, and the nature of its result, constrain the General Association to consider its proceedings not only as unprecedented, but as disrespectful to the Churches of Connecticut,—as an invasion of evangelical order,—as an effort to justify heresy,—and as a public and solemn declaration, that there can be neither ministerial nor Christian fellowship between themselves and the consociated Churches and Pastors.

Passed in Association,

Attest, ANDREW YATES, *Scribe.*

